



Arizona Game and Fish Department

NEWS RELEASE

Nov. 5, 2008

New wolf pair to be released in Arizona

PINETOP, Ariz. – In order to meet ongoing Mexican wolf reintroduction project objectives, a pair of wolves will soon be placed in a temporary holding pen in preparation for their release in eastern Arizona. Arizona Game and Fish Department officials say the wolves will be moved to the pen site, located near Middle Mountain on the Apache National Forest in northern Greenlee County, during the third week of November.

The pair, called the Moonshine Pack, consists of a male and female wolf. The male was born in 2006 and has extensive experience in the wild. Project biologists captured it this past spring after it became ensnared in a leg-hold trap which was lawfully set by a trapper in New Mexico. The female was born in 2003 at the Minnesota Zoo, a participant in the Mexican wolf captive breeding program. Both wolves, especially the female, have genetic characteristics that will enhance the free-ranging wolf population currently in the wild. They have bonded since being placed together in captivity in March.

"The Moonshine Pack release is a part of ongoing efforts to reintroduce Mexican wolves into a portion of their historic habitat in east-central Arizona and southwestern New Mexico," says Chris Bagnoli, the department's wolf project field team leader. "With this release, we are attempting to augment the breeding wolf population now in the wild and also expand the genetic diversity of the wild population."

The pack will stay in a nylon mesh, low-impact acclimation pen for up to two weeks. If they do not release themselves by the end of that period, then wolf project biologists will free them. The pen site is located about 10 miles southwest of Alpine, and will have a signed, one-mile public closure surrounding it, ordered by the USDA Forest Service, to protect the wolves from disturbance. The closure will remain in effect while the wolves occupy the pen, but will not extend beyond Nov. 27.

Bagnoli says that several factors were considered in the selection of the Middle Mountain release site, including appropriate prey density, distance from occupied residences, seasonal absence of livestock grazing, and occurrence of established wolf packs in the area. He also notes that the release site was chosen in close coordination with the public and with approval from the Forest Service.

"Existing packs are doing well, with most producing pups this year; however, the unlawful killing of several wolves is a continuing concern for the wolf project," says Bagnoli. The Moonshine Pack will join 12 other packs now living in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico."

The reintroduction of the Mexican gray wolf is a cooperative, multi-agency effort of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, White Mountain Apache Tribe, USDA Forest Service and USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services.